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ABSTRACT

A guide to implementing a wheelchair assistant training program at the elementary school level is presented. The program was both a solution to social isolation of students with orthopedic disabilities and a way to address the unavailability of staff to push wheelchairs for students in classes spread throughout the school. In addition to providing service and safety, the wheelchair assistant program has facilitated interaction between regular and special students. Student assistants are rewarded with tickets that can be used in the school store, though assistants eventually push children in wheelchairs out of friendship. Increased responsibility and self-esteem have been noted among the regular education students involved in the program. Information is presented on: the sequence of procedures used to train wheelchair assistants, expected school citizenship behaviors, and guidelines for serving as wheelchair assistants. Appendixes include program administration materials, such as a certificate to recognize the wheelchair assistant. (SW)

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Wheelchair Assistant Training Program

Moreno School 1995 (Anita Schulz; Integration Coordinator)

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WHEELCHAIR ASSISTANT TRAINING PROGRAM
MORENO SCHOOL 1995 (Anita Schulz; Integration Coordinator)

Sept. 1990; Francis school in Ontario Ca., a self-contained school with approximately 65 Orthopedically Handicapped children, was merged with a regular elementary school (K-6) in Montclair, Ca. Both Special Education and Regular Education staff and students were combined into one program. Five years later both staff and parents felt that the "Moreno Model" was a successful model of "inclusion". This did not happen without daily problem solving and the willingness of staff and parents to confront and overcome obstacles. The "Wheelchair Assistant Program" was one solution to "social isolation" of Orthopedically Handicapped students as well as to the unavailability of staff for pushing wheelchairs when SDC classes are spread throughout the school. There was also a concern that untrained children in regular education would randomly push wheelchairs without regard for safety. As the program evolved, Physical Therapists under CCS were included and now do a major part of the training. Aides throughout the school and other staff are also involved. The program is truly a result of collaboration.

The following is a description of the "Wheelchair Assistant Program" for those who might be interested in implementing it. Hopefully people will feel free to make adjustments and modifications as needed in order to adapt to the individual characteristics of their program.

Sequence of procedures used to train children in regular education to assist children in wheelchairs:

1. Children are trained quarterly or as the need arises (When the novelty of pushing wheelchairs wears off students sometimes lose interest so more need to be trained). Students are never forced to assist with wheelchairs as helping children with a physical condition is considered a privilege.

2. Children are trained in two sessions; one for upper graders and one for Primary. Three children are chosen from each classroom (primary and upper grades) for responsibility, ability to follow directions, and citizenship. There are approximately 18 children in a group.

3. Training starts with children reporting to therapy on designated day, usually at 12:15. Training lasts until end of school day (1:50).

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4. Sequence of training is as follows:
   a. Children sign in with name and room number.
   b. Integration Coordinator gives brief introduction with expectations for student behavior.
   c. Physical Therapist discusses three types of wheelchairs, their parts and function, as well as safety procedures.
   d. Children are divided into small groups with approximately six children in a group. Each group is assigned to an adult who supervises and instructs while children take turns pushing each other in a wheelchair. Students must demonstrate understanding of wheelchair parts and their function, as well as safety procedures. Only Upper graders learn to take wheelchairs up and down curbs.
   e. Students return to therapy where Integration Coordinator reviews wheelchair procedures and safety precautions followed by an oral quiz.

5. Sign up sheet is given to an assistant who makes a metal wheelchair badge for each child.

6. Records are kept of all children who have been trained, how many badges they have received, and if badge was revoked for unsafe procedures. Attendance records are used for this purpose.

7. Badges are presented to children in the classroom along with an envelope for tickets.

8. Students are rewarded with tickets given by staff members. If they earn 15 or more tickets they may come to the school store and buy a pencil, notebook, toy, jewelry, game, or other item donated by staff and parents.

9. A child may receive only one metal badge. If the badge is lost it can be replaced twice with a typed badge. If all three badges are lost the child must retrain. Children are allowed to retrain only once a year. If three badges are again lost the child may not be a wheelchair assistant until the following year.

10. Badges are revoked for any unsafe procedure such as running with a wheelchair, purposeful collisions, going off the blacktop onto the

dirt or grass etc. After one week, badge is usually returned with a warning. Any further infraction results in permanent removal. In such instances, child may be retrained the following year if improvement in responsibility is noted.

11. After students receive their badge they may push children in wheelchairs to and from the buses, to and from recess, on fieldtrips, and for special occasions and assignments.

12. Children who have worked consistently throughout the year (calculated when tickets are turned in) receive an award at the end of the year for Outstanding Service.

13. More than two thirds of the school has been trained over a period of five years.

As well as providing a service and safety, the wheelchair assistant program has facilitated interaction among Regular and Special students. Students eventually push children in wheelchairs out of friendship rather than to earn tickets. A quote from a 6th grade student exemplifies this, "Thanks, I don't need any tickets. I just do it for the kids!" Increased responsibility and self esteem have also been noted among regular education students.

In conclusion, "The Wheelchair Assistant Program provides a structure for encouraging relationships" (Special Ed. Teacher). A parent of a child with Cerebral Palsy stated, "Ive never worried about my child's academic needs, as the school provides that; however, I have worried about his social needs. This program seems to help satisfy these needs."

For further information contact Anita Schulz, Integration Coordinator: Moreno School, 4825 Moreno Street, Montclair, Ca. 91763. Phone: (909) 624-2672.

MORENO SCHOOL
SCHOOL RULES

SCHOOL CITIZENSHIP PLAN

Students are expected to adhere to four (4) expected behaviors. These behaviors protect the students' individual rights and promote a warm and safe climate to enhance their elementary school experience.

1. Keep hands, feet and objects to yourself.
2. Remain in assigned areas at all times. (classroom and playground)
3. Follow adult directions in a respectful manner.
4. Teasing, swearing, tattling or put-downs are not acceptable!

WHEELCHAIRS AND ASSISTANTS

1. Only licensed wheelchair assistants with a badge are allowed to push wheelchairs.
2. Running with wheelchairs, riding on the back, or pushing off the blacktop is not allowed.
3. If a Wheelchair Assistant breaks a wheelchair rule:
   1st offense: The Wheelchair Assistant's badge will be removed for one week and the child must conference with the Integration Coordinator.
   2nd offense: The Wheelchair Assistant's badge will be removed for the remainder of the year. A conference is required with the Integration Coordinator and the Principal/Assistant Principal.
4. If a child demonstrates responsible behavior in class and on the playground he/she will have the opportunity for retraining and the Wheelchair Assistant's badge may be reinstated.

- John Doe — A line next to students name indicates he has received wheelchair training.

- John Doe — Highlighted name indicates he has received a metal badge.

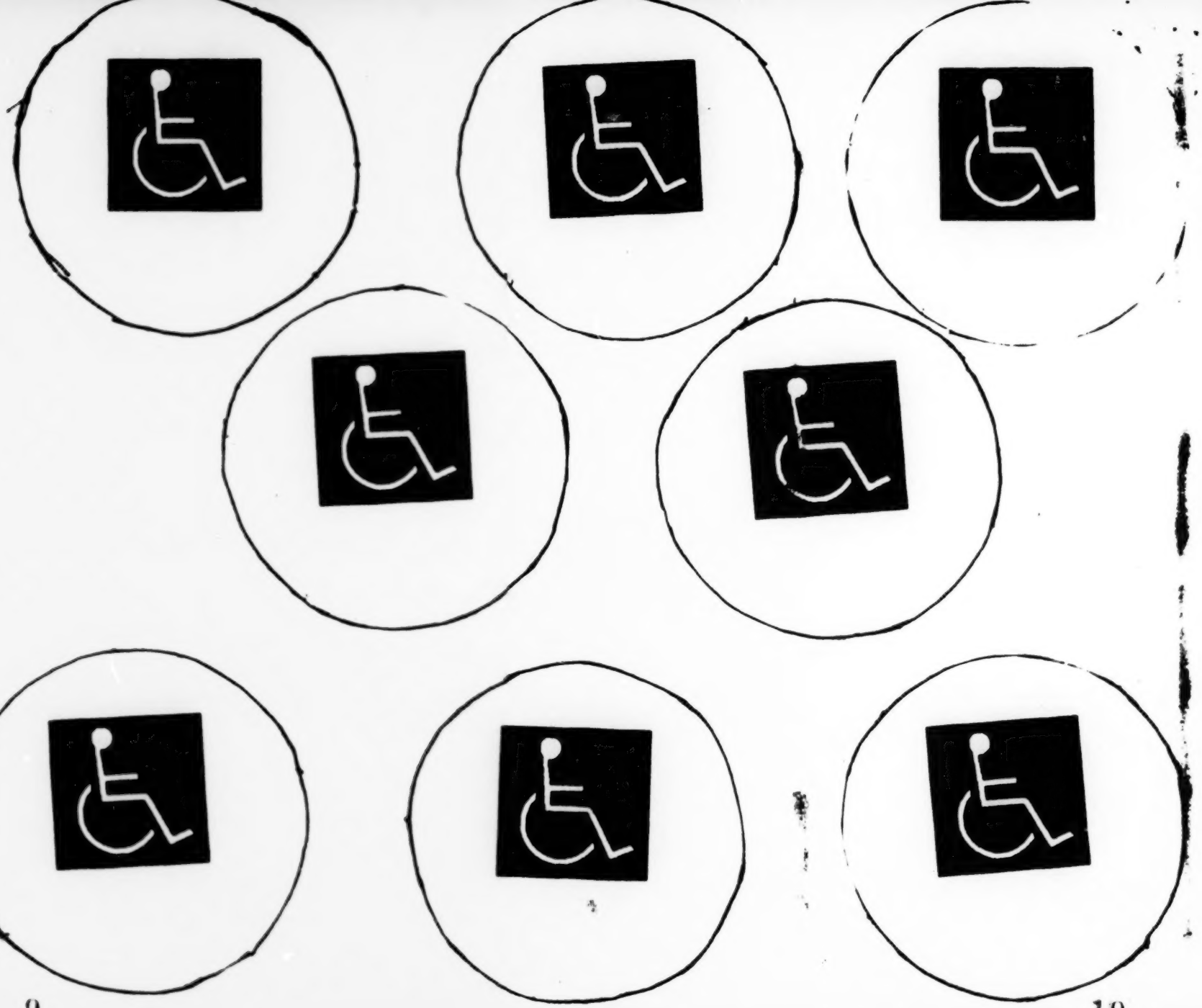
•- John Doe — A dot next to name represents each typed badge.

*Only 1 metal and 2 typed badges are issued.

SAMPLE CLASS ROSTER

Debi Cockrell
Terri Douglas
Cathie Olskey
••Anita Schulz
—Kegham Tashjian
—Karen Wall

Name	Room	#of tickets



JOB WELL DONE

THIS CERTIFICATE IS TO RECOGNIZE YOU FOR BEING AN OUTSTANDING WHEELCHAIR ASSISTANT!

WHEELCHAIR ASSISTANT

INTEGRATION COORDINATOR